Authors Affirm Agrarian Views All Over Again

By ROBERT WYATT

Fifty years after authoring the Agrarian Manifesto, the three surviving contributors took their stand once more at Vanderbilt yesterday, restating their opposition to depersonalized industrial society and affirming traditional values.

The contributors to the 1930 manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand — The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, included: Robert Penn Warren, 77, Pulitzer-Prize winning poet, novelist and critic; Andrew Nelson Lytle, 77, novelist, critic and former editor of *The Sewanee Review*; and Lyle H. Lanier, 77, psychologist and provost emeritus of the University of Illinois.

I'LL TAKE MY STAND contributed significantly to establishing a basis for the Southern literary protest against industrialism, urbanization and the spread of a mass society which the authors say destroyed rural family and religious ties.

"I'm still standing, but not standing still," Lanier told an overflow audience at Underwood Auditorium.

"*I'll Take My Stand* is a kind of gross understatement of the ills we face today. We did not then have in so extreme a form an urban ghetto.

"NOW, APPARENTLY we have a national acceptance of this kind of situation."

The three Agrarians participated in a panel discussion presided over by critic and Vanderbilt alumnus Cleanth Brooks, Gray professor emeritus of rhetoric at Yale, as part of a three-day symposium celebrating the 50th anniversary of the volume and featuring a number of well-known scholars.

Each Agrarian provided a different assessment of the meaning and significance of *I'll Take My Stand* — which opponents often accuse of provincialism, reactionary economics, and a repressive (often feudal and racist) social and political structure.

OF THE GROUP, Lanier proved to be the futurist, speaking at length about the need to develop a post-industrial society which stresses moving from city to country, employing solar energy to its utmost, and limiting or eliminating industrial growth.

He suggested that multi-national corporations might be taxed in order to move people out of the cities and into the country, where the quality of life can be improved.

He pointed out that the authors of *I'll Take My Stand* did not anticipate two technological changes of major significance: the development of nuclear energy and the invention of the computer.

AT SEVERAL POINTS, Lanier referred to the views of presidential candidate Barry Commoner of the Citizen's Party. Commoner is a proponent of solar power and advocates a limited economy.

Later, however, he said he would not vote for Commoner.

Warren, on the other hand, stressed the dehumanizing forces of current urban society, but said *I'll Take My Stand* posed few constructive solutions to the problems it defined.

"I THINK WE were a bit weak on the side of the positive suggestions," he said. "We were dead center on the negative side.

"The question implicit in the old symposium is 'What happens to people?'"

—Staff photo by J.T. Phillips

'Still Standing, But Not Standing Still'

The three surviving Agrarian authors — Andrew Lytle, Robert Penn Warren and Lyle Lanier — re-affirm the anti-industrial values they share at the 50th anniversary celebration yesterday of their publication *"I'll Take My Stand."*

He said a recent survey showed that more than half the people in New York City wanted to move out.

"THEY DON'T EVEN know what *out* is," he said.

Warren, however, failed to outline any positive approach to current social problems.

Lytle addressed the group on the virtues of the traditional rural family and attributed current disorder to its demise.

"MY PARTICULAR interest at the time [of the manifesto] was the small farm as the source of the strength of the state," he said. "The whole family as a unit of society has been damaged nearly to death."

The alternative, he said, is some sort of police state.

"No family is any older than any other," he said. "But it is the family that sees itself as older that possesses a heritage. You've got to have that old grandmother in the back room saying, 'I'll pull your tongue out if you lie.'"

BOTH WARREN AND Lanier said they have altered their views in the last 50 years and agreed that their original Agrarianism should be taken as a metaphor for protest against industrialism.

They said it should no longer be interpreted as a realistic proposal that society should return to the small farm and revive a rural style of life.

Lytle, however, was not so quick to revise his earlier notions.

"I HAVEN'T CHANGED my position one bit," he said after the symposium. "Agrarianism is both a metaphor and a reality."

Other contributors to *I'll Take My Stand* included: Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, Frank Lawrence Owsley, Stark Young, John Gould Fletcher, Herman Clarence Nixon, John Donald Wade and Henry Blue Kline.